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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 325. FOR WEEK ENDING MARCH 23, 1895. [PRICE ONE PENNY.

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SHORT STORIES.

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

No. 325.] *FOR THE WEEK ENDING MARCH 23, 1895.* [PRICE ONE PENNY.

THE TENTH of JUNE.

BY JOHN K. LEYS,

Author of "In the Toils," "My Hindoo Friend," &c.

Illustrated by RAYMOND POTTER.

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT BY GEOFFREY LANE DUNDAS, ESQ., B.A., BARRISTER-AT-LAW.

HAD I been deliberately poisoned, or had I merely been the victim of a strange accident?

That was the question that agitated my mind as I slowly and painfully rose from my bed on the afternoon of the 11th of June, 1883.

It happened in this way.

The morning of the previous day, the 10th of June, I had spent, as usual, in "Queen's Bench No. 4," with occasional flying visits (when the tedium became unbearable) to Appeal Court No. 2. I had a genuine brief (the brief of a friend) in my hand, which was my reason for haunting Court No. 4.

Once or twice during the forenoon a Hindoo looked in at Queen's Bench No. 4. Now, Hindoos and Parsees are as common as peas in the Inns of Court, in the Halls, Libraries, and Common Rooms of the Temple; but one never sees them in Court. The reason is, that all they desire is the status of a barrister, so that they may practice in the courts of their native land. They seldom or never hope to attain a practice in England, and are, therefore, hardly ever seen in an English court of law.

In the weariness of listening to petty and uninteresting details any distraction comes as a relief. When, therefore, I saw a Hindoo in wig and gown standing in the passage between the jury-box and the benches allotted to counsel, I stared at him, I fear rather rudely. He took no notice of me. His mild, dark eyes wandered from the Judge to the witness, and thence to the cross-examining counsel; but they never met mine. "What handsome fellows those Hindoos are!" I whispered to my next neighbour, Jack Linton.

"Do you think so?" he asked carelessly.

"I do," said I. "Look at those beef-fed, heavy, coarsely-modelled British countenances around you, and then look at that Hindoo's, with its clearly cut, intellectual features, its refined expression, its look of alert yet not arrogant or self-assertive intelligence. If I were a woman I should fall in love with a fellow like that if I were to meet him," and I nodded gently in the direction of the Hindoo before us.

"You don't mean to say you think a decent English girl could marry a Hindoo?" asked my friend, incredulously.

"Yes, I do," I returned. "Why not? He is no darker than many a Spaniard or Italian; and I am sure he has twice the brains of an average Englishman. To be sure, there is the religious difficulty——"

My aimless talk was cut short by the Judge rising for the mid-day adjournment. We all rose, and, pouring out of the court, passed along the corridor and down a corkscrew staircase to a large subterranean room, still smelling of damp plaster, where various refreshments were offered for sale.

A long bar ran down one side of the room. Linton and I strolled up to it together, he being on my left. I called for a plate of sandwiches and a glass of sherry; and as I began eating, the Hindoo came in, and, standing next to me on my right, asked for a bottle of lemonade.

He got what he wanted; and then, I remember, with a smiling "Pardon me," he caught up the wide left sleeve of his gown with his right hand, so as to prevent it knocking over my glass of sherry, which was standing close to his left elbow, and reached across me for a cake, or bun. It would

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I just managed to avoid being run over.

have been more civil to have asked me to hand the dish to him; and this made me notice the action. That was all.

Having finished one of my sandwiches, I took a sip of sherry.

Now, I have been favoured by nature with an exceptionally keen sense of taste; and I perceived, or thought I perceived, a peculiar, rather unpleasant taste in the wine. It was so slight that I did not suppose anyone else would have noticed it, but it was enough to make the sherry distasteful to me. I had no doubt it belonged to the spirit with which the wine had been "fortified" by way of preparing it for the English palate.

I went on with my lunch; and as several other men came up to the bar at that moment, the Hindoo retired with his cake and lemonade to one of the small marble-topped tables which were scattered through the room. When I next looked round for him he had finished his modest meal and was gone.

"I don't admire your sherry," I remarked to the young woman behind the bar, "please give me a glass of claret." As I spoke I handed her the glass of sherry (still almost full); she placed it on a small ledge within the counter, and gave me the claret.

When I returned to court I felt queer and uncomfortable—hardly ill, but decidedly uncomfortable.

An hour passed, and I grew worse; I though I would go home. In addition to a feeling of nausea, I experienced a strange numbness which made it a trouble, almost a pain, to move. I just managed to avoid being run over in crossing Fleet Street; and it took me five or ten minutes to climb the stairs to my rooms, and a good half-hour to get into bed.

The afternoon and night that followed seemed to me like a long, hideous dream.

I was not free from pain; but it was not the pain that was my worst symptom. My muscles seemed to be paralysed; while my brain—my imagination, at least—was excited in the strangest way. The most hideous and grotesque figures, the most revolting ideas, crowded my fancy; and at the same time a dreadful depression seemed to crush me with an iron hand.

Gradually the languor abated, but a dreadful nervous headache took its place and lasted until noon. I was still suffering from it when Linton called to see why I had not turned up in court.

"I'll send you a doctor," said he, as he prepared to leave me.

"You needn't mind," said I. "I feel that in spite of the headache, which almost blinds me, I am getting over it."

"What can have been the matter with you?"

"Haven't the least idea. I have not been eating or drinking anything that could hurt a baby. An egg and toast at breakfast; sandwiches and sherry—no, claret—I say, Jack, I wonder if that sherry can have hurt me? I only had half a mouthful of it, but it tasted queer."

"My dear fellow, you're talking absolute nonsense! You only took two teaspoonfuls of the stuff. If it were as deadly as all that, half the lawyers in London would be poisoned by this time—no bad thing, either."

My friend left me, but came back in an hour or two to see how I was getting on. I was better, much better; and in the afternoon I was able to rise.

Next day I went to the courts as usual, and I had not long taken my seat when Jack Linton came in and sat down beside me.

"Glad you're all right again, old man," said he. "By the way," he added suddenly, "rather an odd thing has happened, a sad thing, I should say. One of the girls who acted as barmaids downstairs was found dead in her bed yesterday morning."

A strange chill seemed to pass through my body.

"Had she been drinking any sherry?" I whispered.

"I can't tell. I only heard that she was taken ill suddenly yesterday afternoon, was sent home in a cab, and went to bed, and was found dead this morning. She lived alone, poor girl, so that no one knows exactly how or when she died."

"There will be an inquest?"

"I suppose so."

"Then I will attend and state what happened to me."

Found dead in her bed.

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"Why not make a communication to the police? It would be more effectual, as they would have all the sherry in the refreshment room analysed. And you would avoid all publicity."

I followed my friend's advice; and I afterwards learned that all the sherry which had been opened on the 10th of June had been subjected to close, scientific analysis without any foreign substance, beyond German potato spirit, being found in it. Nor did the autopsy of the body of the unfortunate waitress reveal anything. A verdict of "Death from Natural Causes" was returned.

In spite of these facts I even then entertained a strong suspicion that the poor girl's death was *not* accidental; that in some inexplicable way poison had been introduced either into my wine-glass or into the wine; and that the barmaid, having drunk the glass of wine which I had barely tasted, had suffered, as it were, in my room.

And the reader may imagine how strongly that suspicion was confirmed by a circumstance which came to my knowledge a few days later.

Through the carelessness of my laundress, a letter which had been delivered by post on the eleventh of June, the morning of my illness, dropped behind a pile of books and lay undiscovered for a fortnight. When at length it was put into my hands I found that it contained two lines of writing in a language I did not understand, and beneath them the words—"Churruckpore, June 10th, 1853."

The Hindoo name Churruckpore recalled to my memory the Hindoo who had been standing beside me on the day that had so nearly been my last. I remembered his gesture when he caught up the sleeve of his barrister's gown with his right hand, and, at the same moment, reached across me with his left, thus diverting my attention. Could he have dropped a deadly powder into my glass with his right hand in that fraction of a second? It was possible. And if so, the letter probably contained a boast, or a warning, or something in the nature of an explanation. Or was this a document actually written in 1853, two years before I was born?

I carefully copied the lines, and submitted them to a friend who knew Hindustani. He told me that the meaning was—"The hand of the avenger has once more fallen," with the name "Churruckpore," and the date.

From this it seemed clear to me that the letter had not been intended for me. No; the writer of these lines believed that when he penned them I was lying a cold, neglected corpse in my solitary bedroom in the Temple. They were meant for the eyes of my friends or relations. And they were intended to proclaim the fact that I had died, not by accident, but as a victim. It had doubtless been intended that I should be put to death on account of something that had happened some thirty years before; and, but for an accident, that intention would have been carried out.

I had escaped once; but would I escape if the attempt should be made a second time?

A shudder ran through my limbs as I realised that I was a marked man, an object of vengeance to a foe that could neither be fought nor bribed, an enemy passionless, cold, silent, and remorseless as death itself. Again and again during that summer the haunting thought recurred to me—Should I survive another Tenth of June?

I could not act. I could take no precautions, or none that I could depend upon as being of any avail. I could only await my destiny with such courage as I possessed.

(Signed) G. L. DUNDAS.

4, Plum Tree Court, Temple.
July 15th, 1883.

THE NARRATIVE.

CHAPTER I.

AT SEACOMBE TOWERS.

IT was the 23rd of May, 1884, and Geoffrey Dundas was sitting in his room at Plum-Tree Court, studying an open letter. He had well-nigh forgotten the events of the previous year. The young have short memories; to them twelve

A shudder ran through my limbs.

months are what half-a-dozen years are to men of middle life. And Dundas was in the flood-tide of existence, perpetually busy, either with men or with books; with work or with play.

He was neither rich, nor highly born, nor endowed with unusual talent; but he enjoyed life quite as much as if he had been a millionaire, or the son of a Duke, or an acknowledged genius.

He was only an ordinary young Englishman, fairly good-looking, and fairly well educated. His father had been General Sir Owen Dundas, K.C.B., and this fact lent to the young man a certain prestige, and procured him many kindly services, though it did little to improve his financial prospects.

"I wish to goodness my father had been a solicitor or an accountant," he would often say when lamenting his want of a legal "connection;" but he did not mean what he said. He was proud of his father and his father's career.

Perhaps Geoffrey's most notable characteristic was a certain self-dependence, a resourcefulness, and an ability to look after himself when placed in difficult or trying circumstances, which he had no doubt inherited from his soldier father.

The question Geoffrey was now debating with himself, as, for the third time, he read the letter before him, was whether he should leave town at the height of the season, and bury himself in a country house in Devonshire for some days.

"Of course one ought to be in town just now, when all the Courts are sitting," said Geoffrey to himself; "and I wanted to hear the debate in the House on Thursday. Then there's the polo match, too; and that tennis handicap; and I've not found time to see the pictures yet. On the other hand, I believe Sir Arthur is bored to death down there, and would take it ill if I refused to go. If only I could find out whether Leila is at home or not!"

Yes, Leila was the determining factor in the whole calculation; and her father most provokingly said not a word about her—did not even mention her name.

"Perhaps she has gone to pay a visit to some friends, and the old General simply wants me to keep him company in his solitude. Why can't he come up to town? I wonder whether, if Leila is at home, that fellow Byngham will be there? I wonder whether it's any use my going on thinking about Leila? But I needn't say that; I can't help thinking about her. I fancy it is a bad sign for me that her father does not

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A slender figure dressed in white.

mention her name in his letter. But now that I have an invitation, it would be a pity not to go."

The young man's deliberations ended as any person of judgment who had ever seen him and Leila Chetwynd together might have known they must end—in his writing a letter accepting the General's invitation.

On the appointed day he set out for Devonshire.

The General himself—a fine, tall, upright man, with a sun-tanned face, clean shaven but for a splendid white moustache, and short white hair—came to meet his guest at Torwyn, the nearest railway station. He greeted Geoffrey with a warmth that was unusual for him.

"How like you are to your father!" he exclaimed involuntarily, as he took the young man's hand, and gazed into his face.

Sir Arthur's four-wheeled dogcart, drawn by two powerful bays, was waiting outside the station. The General took the reins himself as a matter of course; and they drove off at a splendid pace.

The fairest of English counties was looking her best. Tall, lithe spruces, and silver birches in their freshest green, stood in rows by the wayside, like maidens decked for a festival. Here and there a laburnum tree by the side of a cottage gateway lighted up the road as with a torch from fairy-land; or a thorn bent beneath its load of scented blossoms; and over all the air was so pure, so keen, so fresh, that it seemed as if care, pain, sickness, languor in that region must be things unknown.

Even Geoffrey, though not as a rule a great admirer of Nature, felt the spell of the summer eve.

"This is like Paradise," he murmured, as if speaking to himself.

The General, sitting at his side, turned his clear blue eyes full upon him.

"Ay," said he, "and Paradise wasn't long without a snake, was it?"

"I hope you don't refer to me?" said Dundas laughing.

Sir Arthur only answered him by cutting one of the horses over the neck; and in the plunging which followed the General found plenty of occupation, and plenty of excuse for saying no more on the subject.

Seacombe Towers—the name was not inappropriate, if it was a little pretentious—stood on a high plateau close to the sea. On the west a thick plantation hid a ravine or "coombe," which ran up from the sea some considerable distance, and afforded a ready access to the beach. The house itself faced the sea, but there was a western front, and in it a side door leading to the hall through a conservatory which was generally used as the main entrance when the family were alone.

Near this door stood a slender figure dressed in white. Geoffrey caught sight of it as the dogcart was whirled rapidly up the avenue; and it made his heart beat fast. The General saw it, and his eyes suddenly filled with tears. A great dog of the rough St. Bernard species was struggling at her side. The dog was pulling at his chain, which the girl was holding in both hands to prevent his leaping up on the dogcart when it came to a standstill; and the great size and weight of the animal made the girl bend backwards to resist the strain.

The breeze—there was generally a breeze at Seacombe—had loosened one or two locks of her hair and blew them across her face, so that she was forced every now and then to leave hold of the chain with one hand that she might clear the hair out of her eyes. The dog seemed to be perfectly aware of this, and every time the operation was performed he dragged the girl a foot or two onwards. Geoffrey thought he had never seen a prettier picture in his life.

He jumped down from the dogcart, and Leila met his smile with a smile as frank as his own, while she offered him her hand. Her dark hair made the best of contrasts with her clear, pale complexion. There was not a touch of colour in her face except her lips. Her eyes may be best described as dark grey; they were clear, and soft, and shining—like the evening sky after a storm. The outline of her face was good, if not entitled to be called beautiful; but the charm of it lay in her mouth. Some fairy had touched it with her wand, and given it

Miss Frewin, Leila's companion and chaperon, was good-nature itself.

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that look of tenderness which one sees sometimes on the lips of a child, very seldom on the face of a grown woman. But after all, Leila Chetwynd was hardly more than a child; she was barely nineteen.

There was only time for a little ordinary talk about the weather, and Geoffrey's journey, before the dressing-bell sounded.

"How long do you mean to stay this time, Mr. Dundas?" asked Leila in all simplicity during dinner.

Her father frowned slightly. He wished that Leila would remember that she was a woman, and not be quite so familiar with her old acquaintance.

"As long as your father will keep me," he answered with a smile.

"Then I hope you won't leave us till we go to London. Haven't you heard? Papa has promised to take me to town for the fag end of the season—the middle of June to the end of July—hardly worth having, just a little better than nothing! Why he won't go before the middle of next month I cannot imagine. And it is so dismally dull here in the meantime that I hope you won't desert us till we go."

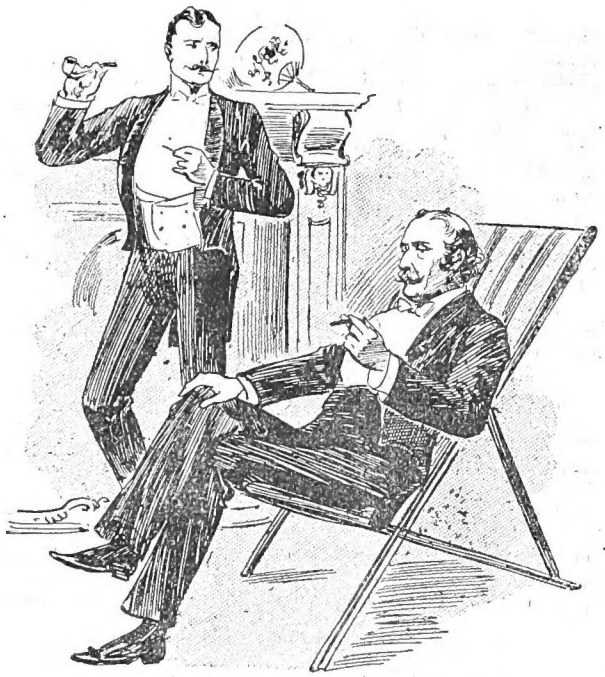
"I shall be glad if you can stay for the next fortnight, Dundas," said the General; "I daresay we shan't stay here ourselves long after that."

Dundas was surprised. He had contemplated a visit of three or four days, a week at most; and though the General's invitation was not so cordial as his daughter's, it seemed sincere enough. But as he did not feel quite sure whether he could stay away from town so long at that season, he gave a reply which "reserved his liberty of action," as the French say; and the subject dropped.

The evening passed most pleasantly. Miss Frewin, Leila's companion and chaperon, was good-nature itself; and Geoffrey managed to spend one of the happiest hours of his life in the neighbourhood of Leila's grand piano.

After he went upstairs that night he asked himself what the General's unusual friendliness could mean. Ever since his boyhood he had paid occasional visits to the Towers; for Sir Arthur was not the man to forget the son of his old friend and comrade, General Dundas. But Geoffrey knew very well that from this sort of friendliness, to accepting him for a son-in-law, was a very long step. He was quite aware that the General favoured the cause of his cousin's son, Captain Byngham.

The two young people went for a ride.



"It will come . . . on the Tenth of June."

He had expected to be asked to Seacombe Towers some time during the year, seeing that he had not been there for the previous twelve months; but he had not expected to be asked at a time when there was no other guest in the house, and when he must necessarily be thrown a great deal into Leila's society. Nor had he ever stayed at Seacombe Towers for more than a week at a time; and now he was asked to stay at least a fortnight.

"Of course Leila means nothing," said Geoffrey to himself in the solitude of his chamber. "She is as guileless as a child. But Sir Arthur is a man of the world. He must know that his daughter is a singularly attractive girl. If he asks me to spend a fortnight in his house, how can he be surprised if I fall in love with her? But last time I was here he as good as told me Captain Byngham was the chosen man—Bah! After all, Leila's hand is not her father's to dispose of as he chooses. I mean to make the most of my chances while I have them."

"My dear," said the General next morning at breakfast, "Captain Byngham says we may expect him to-morrow, and——"

Geoffrey looked at Leila, and a faint blush rose to her cheek. He felt that he would have given a thousand pounds to know what it meant. Did it mean that they were already engaged? Or was it the blush of a maiden on being told that her lover will soon be at her side? Or was it simply an indication that she was conscious of Geoffrey's questioning eyes?

Absorbed in trying to find an answer to these questions, Geoffrey did not notice that his host had not finished his sentence. Immediately afterwards Sir Arthur gathered up his letters and newspapers, and quitted the breakfast-table, leaving a cup of tea behind him untasted.

After breakfast the two young people went for a ride, attended only by a groom; and during that ride Geoffrey came to the conclusion that Leila was not engaged to her cousin.

The day passed quickly enough. Geoffrey could not forget that his rival would appear next day. After dinner the General retired to his study, and did not appear in the drawing-room till a few minutes after ten.

"Will you come into the smoking-room, Dundas?" said Sir Arthur, when the two men were left to themselves.

Geoffrey did not particularly care for talk at that moment.

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He wanted to be alone and let his thoughts busy themselves with the fair girl whose voice still lingered in his ears; but he followed his host to the smoking-room as a matter of course.

The young barrister was not one of those persons commonly called "observant," who take a pleasure in watching their neighbours like a lynx; still, even he could not help thinking that Sir Arthur seemed to have something on his mind. He fidgeted about, made one or two unsuccessful efforts to keep up conversation, and at length fell into a moody silence.

"Did it not strike you as odd," he asked suddenly, "that I should ask you to come into the country at this time of year?"

Geoffrey started and blushed a little at this question. "I thought it was very kind of you," he said.

"I think, perhaps, I ought to tell you the real reason of my asking you," said the General.

Geoffrey stared, wondering what could be coming next.

"The fact is," said the old man, with a queer look in his face, "I wanted to increase the garrison."

"To increase the garrison!" echoed Geoffrey in amazement. "Do you mean that you are in danger?"

"Yes," said the old man quietly, "we are in danger."

"Impossible!"

"It is true."

"Do you mean that you have enemies?"

"Yes."

"Enemies that can harm you living here, in your own house in England, in the nineteenth century?"

"Yes, I do."

There was a moment's silence.

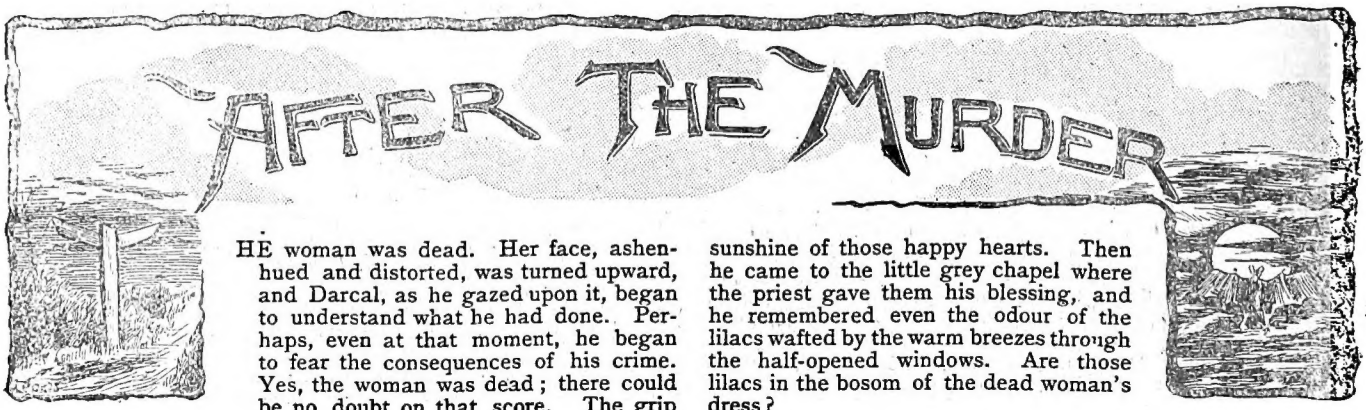
"I hope you can trust me, Sir Arthur, to do my best for you and—for the family—that is, if I can be of any service."

"Yes, I can trust you."

"I do not ask what the nature of this peril may be," said Geoffrey after another pause; "but you can, perhaps, tell me when it may be expected to come upon you?"

"It will come," said the General, "if at all, on the Tenth of June."

(To be continued.)



HE woman was dead. Her face, ashen-hued and distorted, was turned upward, and Darcal, as he gazed upon it, began to understand what he had done. Perhaps, even at that moment, he began to fear the consequences of his crime. Yes, the woman was dead; there could be no doubt on that score. The grip had been too firm, and the lithe, sinewy, rage-strengthened fingers had clutched the white, soft, slender neck with a ferocity that only death could appease.

The brutality of the crime did not move Darcal so much as wonderment that his purpose had been accomplished so easily. She had scarcely struggled when his fingers closed upon her throat. She could not scream, and her gurgling sobs were smothered by the other hand of the murderer, close pressed upon the woman's mouth. Darcal was calm enough now, as he stood there, looking down into that face so cold and still: the eyes almost closed, and the lips parted as if the sleeper were trying to utter the incoherent thoughts of her dreams.

And now he wondered why he had killed her. He wanted to analyse and make clear to his understanding the motives that had impelled him to this murder. Yes, murder. He would not try to disguise or palliate the truth; and, having admitted the truth, he derived an intensity of pleasure in contemplation of his crime that can be appreciated only by those who have wantonly, or in cold blood, slain a fellow being.

Why had he killed her? That he was justified Darcal did not doubt for an instant. It was only necessary that he should collect his thoughts, arrange the details in their proper order, and trace the logic of events to find ample justification for this murder. It was not necessary that his theory of self-defence should satisfy anyone but himself, for it was impossible that anyone else should ever know who had murdered the woman, or why she was murdered. Only in the rarest instances are murderers unable to arrive at this self-justification, and Darcal was confident that his was not an exceptional case.

Going back to that troth-plighting under the apple blossoms, in that distant land where the flowers are perennial beneath skies that are for ever blue, Darcal sought for his justification and found it not, though he saw dimly through the mists of the years that followed a fateful shadow creeping athwart the sunshine of those happy hearts. Then he came to the little grey chapel where the priest gave them his blessing, and he remembered even the odour of the lilacs wafted by the warm breezes through the half-opened windows. Are those lilacs in the bosom of the dead woman's dress?

And the future—how bright it looked, and how swiftly it came to the flower-decked portals of their present; and what a miserable, crime-stained future it was, corroding the honour of the husband, corrupting the virtue of the wife. And so they parted, and went their ways, never dreaming, even then, that it would come to this.

For a time Darcal could not bring himself to a close contemplation of the incidents immediately environing the slaying of the woman. They were too sordid, too insignificant in comparison with the enormity of the event. At first he tried to justify himself by accusing the woman; but, strangely enough, that did not satisfy him—it lacked the strength of an honest judgment. There was a time, perhaps, when such an accusation would have acquitted him before all the world and in the tribunal of his own conscience—but not now. The statute of limitations had intervened to mitigate even the heinousness of her crime.

The bells of a distant steeple struck seven as Darcal softly closed the door behind him and walked down the stairs to the street. In the hurrying crowd he was safe from that human justice so frequently at variance with individual estimates of right and wrong. The hounds of the law could not track him now, and only his own soul could sit in judgment over him.

Why had he killed her? The question kept beating through his brain like a hammer on the anvil. The monotonous iteration became momentarily more painful, manifesting itself in a physical depression, as if extraneous forces were exerting their powers to oppress. Why had he killed her? Why had he killed her?

True, he had asked her for money, and she had refused him, with a sneer on her lips and the scorn of bitter contempt, distorting a face already hardened by reckless disregard of every womanly virtue. But that refusal could not be construed as a sufficient motive for what he had done.

The perfume of lilacs and roses, gushing warm from the

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open door of a florist's recalled to Darcal's memory the scene in the little grey chapel: the priest blessing their union, the coloured shadows of the stained windows, through which the sunlight streamed; and, like a ghostly melody, he seemed to hear the music of birds, singing in the magnolias—the twitter and carol of merry songsters, distinct and clear through the turmoil of the town.

Surely that shadow, just beyond the side-glance of his half-closed eye, had substance; else why did it so persistently make its presence felt? That absurd fancy again—absurd, but terrifying as an illusion that one fears may become a delusion firmly fixed in a mind capable of understanding that such fixity means insanity. An absurd fancy—and Darcal laughed.

The beggar on the crossing shuddered to hear the laugh of this man hurrying by, instinctively recognising the horror of the thoughts that provoked it—knowing, as some natures know, that the man who laughed thus, alone in the crowd, was one not at peace with himself and God—a creature to be dreaded, shunned, abhorred.

Once more Darcal stopped, and again his eyes stared into the awful gloom of this house, intently listening to hear a moan, a shriek, any sound, human or inhuman, that might break the silence that brooded where the dead woman lay, with her ashen face upturned in the darkness. Why had he returned? His intention had been flight, though he was fain to admit, on reflection, that he had no set destination for that flight, guided only by the instinct of self-preservation. Why had he come back to this scowling abode of sin and death? And as the murderer gazed at the silent house and remembered what lay within, a terror came upon him that only the outcry he dreaded would have lifted.

This time Darcal went away determined never to come back, reasoning with himself that it was not safe for a murderer to haunt the scene of his crime. He would cross the city to his lodging, where the hangman could not find him and where the vengeance of offended justice would never seek him.

Still his thoughts ran upon his motive for this murder. Still he debated with himself his reasons. Why had he killed her? Not because she had refused to give him money, but because—ah! that was the reason! He had discovered his true motive at last. How simple, how natural, what a complete and unmistakable justification!

Yes, he had found it at last, and there was relief, almost happiness, in the thought. The whole world would justify and give him sympathy. He need not fear the hangman, because they do not hang men who strangle women for that. He need not fear the reproaches of a too-exacting conscience, for this monitor accepted the justification as ample and adequate.

He could look the house squarely in the face now; he could meet its scowl with the stern consciousness of rectitude—as the executioner meets the frown of those who execrate him for his work upon those they love. He was strong in the faith of justification.

The man who came down the stairway stepped aside to let Darcal pass, but the latter paused to make inquiry.

"Have you seen her?" His voice was low, but its tone was pleasant, and the other was constrained to reply.

"Seen whom?" he asked.

"Why, my—the woman who lives—who lived here."

"No. There was no answer to my ring at the bell. The house is dark. They are out, I imagine."

"*She* is not out," said Darcal, earnestly; "let us go in."

Darcal took hold of the man's arm and gently urged him up the stairs.

They stood together in the darkness of the apartment, heavy with the odour of lilacs. They could hear the little clock on the mantelpiece ticking steadily.

"There is no one here," said Darcal's companion.

"You are mistaken," the murderer answered; "*she* is here. It is not three hours since I left her. I will show her to you."

Darcal struck a match, and gradually the yellow light pervaded the room, revealing the form of a woman outstretched upon the floor, with her face upturned. Darcal waited until the sulphur of the match had burned away, and then he lighted the gas.

Darcal and the man looked down into the woman's face. The eyes were wide open, now staring up at Darcal, and there was a sinister smile on her lips—a ghastly smile, a smile of triumph and satisfied vengeance.

"Why did you kill her?" inquired the man.

"Because—because I loved her," Darcal answered.

I.

"PITY a grass widow!" sighed Mrs. Vancouver, with a shrug of her shoulders as she turned to Lady Greyland.

"When does your husband return?"

"I cannot say; his business is keeping him longer than he anticipated. If I had known that weeks were to drag into months I should have conquered my prejudice against a sea voyage, and braved the Atlantic."

"I believe Stuart will return unexpectedly and surprise you some day. It would be just like him!" declared Lady Greyland.

"Poor dear fellow, he is longing to be back."

"I don't wonder!" replied her companion, with a critical glance at the fair woman married to her nephew Stuart.

Mrs. Vancouver was conscious of the scrutiny.

"Why do you gaze at me as though I were a vanishing point or a phantom form?"

"You are looking so wonderfully well, my dear."

"That is not surprising. I have lived the stupidest, quietest life imaginable since Stuart left, vegetating in the country, going to bed at ten, and rising at seven. My complexion is due to healthy exercise and a schoolroom diet; not, thank goodness, to the art of my maid. But now I have come to London I shall doubtless be bitten by the season's festivities, and then——"

She broke off shortly, resting her chin on the tip of her fan, while a doubtful expression stole over her face.

"You will lose the country bloom in a week if you plunge into the dissipation as recklessly as you did last year."

"The flowers must fade," laughed Mrs. Vancouver. "And I have a restless nature. It has been perfect pain to me stagnating in Wiltshire."

"You are too fond of making yourself out a butterfly. I hear you have been playing Lady Bountiful, and making Stuart's tenants adore you by a hundred acts of sympathy and kindness."

"Don't believe it," said Ray Vancouver. "If I had their children to tea occasionally, and scandalised the natives by running races in the park, it was only because I have no children of my own to play with."

"You will never learn the inestimable benefit of getting

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credit for what good you do in the world. You always have an excuse for every virtuous action."

Lady Greyland rose as she spoke.

"Thank you so much," said Mrs. Vancouver, "for dining with a deserted creature like myself. I should have been so melancholy here on the first evening, thinking of the great fathomless ocean between me and my dear boy."

She glanced at a photograph of her husband, and Lady Greyland thought she caught the sound of sobbing in her niece's voice.

"You must go everywhere with me till he is home again," she said fondly. Nevertheless, she left her sad, for Mrs. Vancouver was dissatisfied with life, and pondered deeply as she sat alone in the silent room. Thought is an unaccountable evil which attacks the mind at intervals in quite an unexpected manner.

After mentally dissecting the mysteries of Lady Greyland's teagown, which had made her look so very much slimmer than she really was, and wondering whether microbes lurked in the lips and kissing should be abolished from the face of the earth, Ray wandered back in fancy to the early days of her girlhood. Why had one face risen before her with haunting recollections just when she most wished to blot it from her memory? The face of a man years older than herself, whose will once influenced her so strongly, that had it not been for Stuart she would have linked her fate with his.

Yet her husband never knew or guessed there was anything deeper between them than "friendship," that wide word, comprising such a multitude of contradictions. They were friends still, and in one of her husband's letters she learnt he had met Kenneth Reynolds in America. She thought of the great expanse of water between her and those two men, fancying in the roar of the London traffic she could hear the noisy monotonous thunder of waves, and then the foaming water tearing down the shingle. She seemed to see its bosom heave as with the very passion of unrest, and haunted by the sense of its cruel and omnipotent strength Mrs. Vancouver went wearily to bed.

The following morning she received a letter from Lady Greyland. "Come this afternoon," it ran, "I have a surprise for you."

Ray liked a mystery, and drove to her aunt's house full of anticipation.

She entered the room in the full swing of youthful spirits. Lovers of the picturesque would have fallen down and worshipped Mrs. Vancouver, as she drew back involuntarily, in her Liberty gown and wide-brimmed hat, a tremulous smile parting her lips.

A man rose and met her gaze. In her he recognised the girl of three summers ago! The sunlight had fallen on her where she stood, touching her reddish brown hair of the tint known as Venetian, with which is generally associated sea-green eyes and a snow-white throat. There was something of an underlying fire in her expression as she turned to Lady Greyland.

"You were right," she said, "this is a surprise! I thought Mr. Reynolds was in America."

"He only returned yesterday, and as he has so lately seen Stuart I thought you would like to meet him."

"So kind of you!" she murmured extending her hand. "Well! what news of my truant husband?"

Mrs. Vancouver spoke flippantly.

"I met him at a dance given by Mrs. Graeme, a well-known lady novelist in New York. He was talking to a dowager who weighs sixteen stone, and mingles irrelevant gush and ponderous jocularity in her conversation."

"Then I need not be jealous," laughed Ray.

Kenneth looked her straight in the face but did not reply. Something in his eyes troubled her.

"Stuart seems enjoying himself at any rate," put in Lady Greyland somewhat tactlessly; "but then the Americans are noted for hospitality, and he is bound to be a favourite wherever he goes."

"It is a mistake to have a fascinating husband," declared Mrs. Vancouver, with the same forced gaiety of voice and manner.

"Did he look well?"

"Oh! in the very best of health and spirits," replied Kenneth Reynolds. His tone implied that Mr. Vancouver was not pining for his wife's presence.

"I suppose he must amuse himself, poor dear!" she said. "It would be dreadful moping in a huge hotel alone."

Her eyes were slightly averted from Kenneth's, while her smile faded. He seemed suddenly aware of her depression, and shot a kindly glance of sympathy across the delicate china cups among which Lady Greyland's slim hands were moving.

"Sugar and cream?" she asked, but Mrs. Vancouver did not reply. Unconscious of her silence the words re-echoed in her ears—"sugar and cream."

"Kenneth is like a bird of ill omen," she thought.

Once more she looked at the brocaded chairs and silver tea-tray—they were quite familiar to her, yet engrossed her attention. The chairs were rather vivid in their colouring, and she could see Kenneth's face in the tray?"

"What are you thinking of?" asked Lady Greyland.

"Nothing of any importance," replied Ray, plunging suddenly into a hundred items of gossip, such as she knew rejoiced her aunt's heart and disgusted her friend—that friend of three summers ago.

II.

THE faint suspicion which sprang to life in Ray's heart when Mr. Reynolds first spoke of her husband increased tenfold as the days wore on. She never saw him without an uncomfortable feeling that he knew more than he cared to own, and was concealing something painful yet of grave importance. Stuart's prolonged absence increased the doubts and fears for which she reproached herself every hour of the day.

Kenneth Reynold's reserve on the subject troubled her, for he seldom spoke of Mr. Vancouver, and always appeared glad to turn the conversation, at the same time endeavouring to cheer her loneliness by a hundred delicate, unobtrusive acts of kindness. If he wondered at the pallor of her cheeks, and the lines beneath her eyes, he said nothing, and for a while Ray welcomed silence gratefully. But the strain of uncertainty was telling on her, and at last his very reticence drove her to despair.

He had come to call late one afternoon, and found her seated in her favourite attitude when she had some serious subject to consider, her hands clasped, her eyes looking fixedly upwards, and her body thrown backwards in a long, low chair.

"Why are you so depressed?" he asked in his mellow voice, which seemed to invite confidence.

Mrs. Vancouver tapped her foot on the ground impatiently, while the tears sprang into her eyes. She saw in his question the possibility of ending her horrible speculations on Stuart's absence. One moment she forced herself to take a hopeful view of life, making good resolutions, and struggling vainly to think no evil. But "Doubt" with its black whispers, renewed the attack, and Ray found herself laying her harassed mind bare before this man, and telling him her secret thoughts which, in more peaceful moments, she would have given her soul to recall.

When first she spoke to him her face looked slightly worn with fatigue in the twilight, but as he rose to leave her it was livid and haggard. She had wrung the cruel truth from his lips, and watched her idol totter from his lofty pedestal, leaving uncovered the feet of clay. Yet still she could hardly believe the cruel rumour that dispelled her girlish illusions.

That Stuart could have wearied of her, and so far forgotten his marriage vows as to sin irretrievably, seemed too hideous and impossible. She had drawn the truth from Kenneth's unwilling lips, though his wish to spare her pain made the task a hard one. The cruel facts lay before her in crude incredible plainness, while she sat staring in hopeless apathy.

"What can I do?" she asked, in a low hollow voice.

"I hardly know how to advise you," he murmured, "but of course you would never go to America yourself and discover——"

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"The truth!" she ejaculated, "why not? How can I stay here with this cloud upon my life?"

"Whatever you decide on is sure to be right," he replied. "All that I have told you is, so far as it is possible for anyone to speak with certainty, perfectly true. God grant that you may find it otherwise."

Ray determined upon her plan of action quickly, restraining from any comments on the accusations against her husband, and simply stating her intention of leaving England by the next mail.

"You have an iron will—an iron nerve," said Kenneth Reynolds with admiring wonder. "But you are too young and beautiful to travel alone unprotected, and arrive friendless in a strange country." A look of fear crept into her eyes as she thought of the unknown future.

"Alone!" The word held terrors innumerable.

"By the next mail, did you say?" he asked.

She bowed her head.

"I have some American friends crossing at that time—a lady with two daughters. I could give you an introduction."

Mrs. Vancouver tried to express her thanks.

"I am returning to New York at the beginning of next month," he continued; "but if you decide finally upon this step, I can go by the same mail, and be on the spot if you should need me. Let me take all responsibility off your hands, book your passage, and place you under the care of my friends."

"You are too good," she stammered, "but I would rather no one knew my movements."

"No one in England, naturally. They would worry you with ceaseless questions, and, for the time being, your secret must be kept closely. But my friends would know nothing, and I will do everything in my power to further your comfort and convenience."

Again she thanked him falteringly, and held out her hand. He pressed it fervently as he bade her good-bye.

The door closed. Alone she stood, for all the world meant but that one word to her then. Her heart's uneven beating seemed to cease suddenly, while the stillness closed round her motionless figure as a wall entombing life. For a single second she was back in the past, dreaming a girl's fancies, hoping a girl's hopes. Then the weary vigil of the woman who has loved and been awakened commenced, and Ray laughed ironically, the jealous anger and bitter resentment in her heart burnt to ashes of despair.

III.

Mrs. Vancouver was standing in the old-fashioned hall of her country house, speaking to Kenneth Reynolds.

"I have arranged everything for a long absence," she said. "Heaven knows when I may set foot in the old home again! Yet no one has any idea I am leaving England to-morrow, except yourself."

"That is well. Have you received the letter you were expecting from Stuart?"

"No; he cannot have written by this mail. Till now he has kept up the farce."

Her face grew hard, and she paced the floor with the restlessness of some untamable creature.

"I am afraid you were annoyed with me for coming down to-day, but I was most anxious to see you."

"What does it matter; what does *anything* matter?"

"To-night you sleep in town?"

"Yes; I am going up by the afternoon train."

"So am I, and will drive with you to the station if you have no objection."

Mrs. Vancouver consented reluctantly.

As the sound of wheels approached, she looked with burning eyes at the dog-cart in which she had so often driven her husband, feeling that Kenneth's presence was an intrusion. But Kenneth had known well how to make himself necessary to her in those days of misery, when from sheer weakness she felt unable to enter into mortal combat against fate without the strong hand of a clever man. From his point of view women were anomalies, their hearts outweighed their brains, and even the most reasonable lost their heads in times of emergency. Without her knowledge, he had studied Ray's nature, and could influence it at will.

"This is all so like a bad dream," she said, gathering up the reins, and averting her head from Kenneth as he sprang to her side. She was vexed that his presence brought her the slightest comfort.

"Strained to a certain point feeling becomes numbness," he said, as though reading her thoughts.

He looked at the darkly circled eyes, and the lips closed in a hard line. What would he not have given to see them smile? Hardly had the thought passed through his mind than they parted involuntarily.

"Why do you smile?" he whispered.

The colour rose to her cheeks, while she flashed on him a look of surprise.

"I don't know," she replied. "I felt compelled." Her fingers seemed to relax their firm hold on the horse, and a sensation of faintness crept over her. The fresh young mare plunged forward, some children throwing stones startling her at that very moment.

At first Ray hardly noticed what had happened till she was conscious of the swift rush of air in her face. On—on—they dashed, defiance in the mare's snorting nostrils, and vice in her wild eyes. Mrs. Vancouver rose to her feet, realising she had lost control, and pulling at the reins with a mighty effort. Seeing the danger Kenneth added his strength to hers. A sudden snap—a cry from the woman—a groan from the man—and they grasped the broken leather in mute horror and amazement!

"Save me!" she cried. "For pity's sake save me!"

Her words woke him to fresh action. With a bound he leapt from the swaying cart straight on to the horse's back, and groped for the broken reins flapping in the wind. For a second she watched him grasp the harness, then roll to the ground half-caught in a loose rein, which dragged him under the clattering hoofs of the infuriated beast.

Blind, dumb, and deaf with horror, she still clung to the seat, dimly seeing a tall figure in the road that darted forward and wrestled with the horse's head. The rapid motion ceased, and with it the unbearable throbbing of her temples, as she sprang thankfully from her perilous position to the safe, firm earth. Two strong arms clasped her tremblingly—fervently, and Ray was sobbing on her husband's breast.

"Oh! My darling! My darling! Are you hurt?"

The words were simple enough, but they rang out in agonised intensity.

"No," she gasped. "No! But what of him?" pointing to the senseless figure of a man lying face downwards in the mud of the country road.

Stuart raised the heavy body and looked long into the blood-stained face.

"Poor fellow," he murmured compassionately. "I am afraid he is terribly injured, and you were coming to meet me too. If only you had not received my letter in time! Stay with him, Ray, while I run for a doctor. Here, help me to get him to the bank and hold his forehead—so."

"Run quickly, dear," she murmured. "There may not be much time."

Too bewildered to wonder at her husband's re-appearance, Ray sat half-dazed under the sweet-smelling hedge. Kenneth moved faintly and opened his eyes.

"What has happened?" he asked.

"Stuart is here—Stuart," she said.

"*Stuart!*" he cried, trying to raise himself, but sinking back with a moan.

"Ray," he whispered, "bend down, I am dying, but I *must* speak. Can you hear me?"

"Yes, yes."

"It was all a lie, Ray,—that—that story against your husband. I was scheming to get you away—alone—with me. I—I loved you—forgive——"

The words came singly and faintly on the summer air, "Forgive!"

He murmured them again and again as the life ebbed slowly out of vein and pulse, and a miserable sinner sank down—down—down into deep waters.

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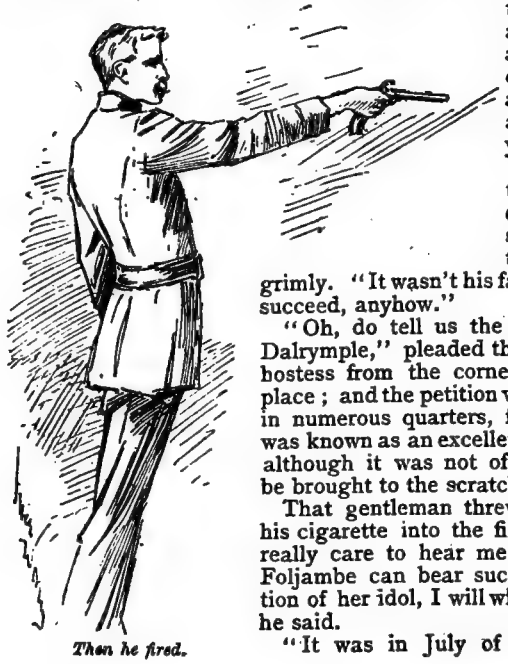
TOLD BY THE MAJOR.

THE morning after the dance at Arden Tower last month was a drencher, and no mistake; there was no getting out of doors except under the penalty of the most complete soaking. Perhaps one's natural disinclination to face the unpropitious elements was heightened by that feeling of comfortable lassitude which seems invariably to impregnate the mental atmosphere of a country house on the morrow of a Terpsichorean festival; anyhow, as one by one the house party, after a late breakfast, sauntered into the old oak-paneled central hall, with its huge open hearth, on which the great logs blazed cheerfully with many a crackle and splutter, each dropped lazily into a comfortable arm-chair, and, after one glance at the rain-blurred windows, settled down resignedly to a quiet morning indoors, with hardly a regretful thought in the direction of their host's well-stocked coverts, or his amply-furnished stables.

"Well," said Miss Foljambe—a pretty, sparkling brunette, and an enthusiastic votary of Diana—"I don't care. He may be as foolishly in love with that handsome old wife of his as you assert, Mr. Elton; but if a tithe of the young men of the present day were destined in after-life to turn into such sweet, unselfish, kind-hearted old gentlemen as General Fordyce, it would be a better look-out for the world at large than it is now. My only wonder is how ever he got on in his profession; I cannot understand his bringing himself to harm any living creature."

"They would have told you a different tale in India thirty years ago, Miss Foljambe," remarked a tall, dark man seated nearly in the centre of the group. "It was before my time, of course, but even now, 'Fordyce' is a name that carries a terrible meaning to many a native. He had totted up a pretty heavy score to his own bat before 1859 came to an end. Did you ever hear how he came to shoot his wife?"

"Shoot his wife! Major Dalrymple," exclaimed the startled young lady. "Good gracious! what do you mean? My dear old General kill a woman? He *couldn't* do such a horrible thing! You are laughing at me; but I don't think it a nice joke at all, I can tell you."



Then he fired.

"Well, he tried hard enough to do so," replied the Major, grimly. "It wasn't his fault he didn't succeed, anyhow."

"Oh, do tell us the story, Major Dalrymple," pleaded the voice of his hostess from the corner of the fire-place; and the petition was re-echoed in numerous quarters, for the Major was known as an excellent *raconteur*, although it was not often he could be brought to the scratch.

That gentleman threw the end of his cigarette into the fire. "If you really care to hear me, and if Miss Foljambe can bear such a desecration of her idol, I will with pleasure," he said.

"It was in July of that terrible year 1857, the year that will be remembered in many an English and Indian home with bitterest sorrow—ay, and with heartfelt pride, too. The hideous fate of hundreds of English women and children, the almost superhuman gallantry of the handful of British troops against the overwhelming hordes of mutinous demons of cruelty, will never be forgotten while history lives. All the details of that fearful struggle we shall never know. Many a little garrison of now almost forgotten posts fought like heroes, though their ultimate annihilation leaves no record of the deeds that would have ranked beside those of the defenders and rescuers of Lucknow had any living creature survived to tell the tale.

"Among the miniature sieges, these mad despairing conflicts, where men fought with the reckless courage of desperation to save those they loved from a doom too hideous to bear thinking of, was the one which is the scene of my little story.

"Of the little garrison of Beinapoor, eight hours after the first attack of the mutineers, who thirsted to avenge their imaginary wrongs and glut their bestial ferocity on that devoted handful of Europeans, there remained only fifteen men of the A Company of the 120th Regiment, Captain Gerald Fordyce, and half-a-dozen native servants who had been faithful to their salt.

"Inch by inch, they had been driven from one line of defence to another, every hour bearing its token to the fury of the struggle in the shape of dead or dying comrades; and now nothing was left for them but to make their last hopeless stand in the open central court of the large building which had served as a barrack for the detachment. There was hardly a cartridge left of their little store of ammunition, and only a few feeble barricades interposed between them and their yelling assailants. Many of the small band were wounded, and, even as they stood there, awaiting their inevitable doom, but prepared to sell their lives as dearly as brave men may, some of their number dropped helpless and feeble to the ground, exhausted by fatigue and loss of blood.

"Saddest sight of all was the white, drawn face of a fair young girl, who stood in their midst, clasping with both slender hands the arm of Gerald Fordyce as she looked up into his eyes with a mute but terrible appeal in her own. It was the face of his bride of a few short weeks.

"'You have *one* cartridge left in your revolver, Gerald,' she said in a hoarse whisper. 'I claim it. I *must* not fall into their hands alive, remember. You can save me from that horror, at least. Oh, my darling, my darling! swear to me by the love we bear each other that it shall be as I ask. Even death from your dear hand——.'

"She ceased, and a terrible shudder shook his strong frame from head to foot as he looked down into those deep, loving, appealing eyes, his own wild with the torture of that awful choice. Then he turned away and hid his face from her, as the fate of the woman he loved so fondly at the hands of the shrieking, bloodthirsty throng that clamoured at the barricades pictured itself to his imagination.

"'Promise me, Gerald,' she repeated. 'When all hope is gone and the last moment comes—promise!'

"'I promise, love,' he said at last, in so low a whisper that it almost failed to reach her ears. 'I swear it.'

"Then he turned to his men with a few words of praise and encouragement—but, alas! what room was left for hope now?

"They had not long to wait. A very few minutes sufficed for the demolition of the feeble obstructions to the mutineers' progress. A crash or two, some dropping shots, and then with frantic yells of triumph that fiendish crew swarmed into the court.

"The moment had come. Gerald Fordyce strained his wife

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in his arms, close, close, and covered her face with mad, despairing kisses; then he stood off a few paces and levelled the revolver at that beloved head.

"'Ah! no,' she cried, with a woman's terror of disfigurement. 'Not my face, Gerald! My heart—here!'

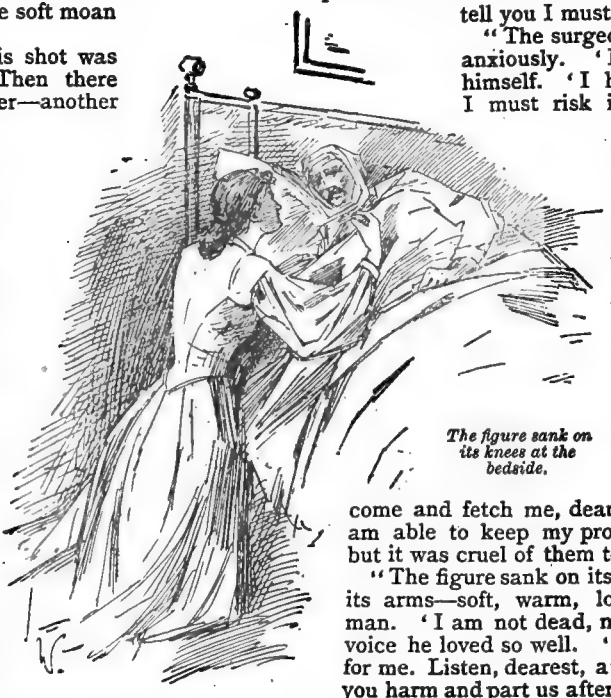
"He changed his aim. 'I shall not be long after you,' he muttered. 'Farewell, Muriel.'

"Then he fired, and with a little soft moan she fell at his feet.

"Hark! What was that? His shot was echoed by a volley outside. Then there came the sound of a British cheer—another—and yet another.

"Captain Fordyce threw up his hands in frantic horror. 'Rescued!' he cried, and his voice rang with intolerable agony. 'Oh, God! what have I done? Too late—too late!'

"Then the steel waved around his head, and, silent despair on his white, set features, he rushed at the mob of sepoys in front of him, determined to rejoin in death the woman he had slain.



The figure sank on its knees at the bedside.

"Many weeks have elapsed, and a surgeon is bending anxiously over a little cot in the temporary improvised hospital at Beinapoor. 'By the Lord Harry! he's pulled through after all,' mutters the gallant medico to himself as the patient's eyes slowly opened, and with a feeble and totally ineffectual effort to raise himself he sinks back again on the pillows, his head and limbs one complicated mass of bandages. 'I believe he's conscious at last.'

"Gerald Fordyce looked about him. 'What is all this?' he whispered faintly. 'Where am I?'

"'On the high road to recovery, I hope, my dear fellow,' is the cheerful reply. 'It's been the deuce and all to keep the life in you, but I've succeeded somehow. You must keep perfectly quiet—do you hear?—perfectly quiet, or you'll slip through my fingers after all.'

"Gradually recollection came back to the sorely wounded man, but with recollection came, alas! despair.

"'Life?' he murmured feebly, while a look of horror gathered on his features. 'Why could you not let me die in peace? Life? And Muriel dead by my hand. Let me be. I tell you I must die—I *will* die.'

"The surgeon looked at him attentively and anxiously. 'I had forgotten that,' he said to himself. 'I had forgotten. Well, I suppose I must risk it. The shock *may* kill him, but it is his only chance. If he goes on like this he will die before sunset to a certainty.'

"Then he turned and beckoned to a figure at the other end of the room—a figure that rose, trembling with overpowering anxiety, and approached the cot in obedience to his summons.

"'You must be calm,' he whispered. 'Be a brave girl and we shall save him yet.'

"Captain Fordyce turned his poor bandaged face and saw the figure standing beside him. 'Muriel!' he whispered faintly. 'Muriel! How good of you to come and fetch me, dear. I shan't be long now before I am able to keep my promise. They meant it for the best, but it was cruel of them to try and keep me from you.'

"The figure sank on its knees at the bedside and wreathed its arms—soft, warm, loving arms—around the wounded man. 'I am not dead, my darling,' came to his ear in the voice he loved so well. 'You must live, Gerald—not die—for me. Listen, dearest, and be very, very quiet, or it may do you harm and part us after all. I am afraid you are a very bad shot, Gerald, even at so short a distance, for you only wounded me when you fired. They cured me a week ago, and I am strong and well again, and able to nurse you. See! Lay your poor battered head here, my husband, and rest. Oh, Gerald! I am so happy.'

"And that, Miss Foljambe, was how your pet General came to shoot his wife," concluded the Major.

HOW INDIAN JOE WENT TO HIS DEATH.

ONE night, on coming to my tent from my claim in the gulch, I found the following note, scrawled on the back of a blank location notice, sticking in a cleft stick in front of the tent:—

"Git yer hoss an gun an come down to the store az soon az yer git this. Biznes of importance. COMMITTEE."

I knew what it meant, an all-night ride—possibly several days and nights—so I set about getting my supper and frying an extra quantity of bacon. Supper over, I wrapped the surplus bacon and a few squares of pilot bread in a bandana, tied it with a canteen to the saddle, and fastened down the tent fly. Then, taking up my rifle and saddle, I went to where my horse was picketed, and, saddling, was soon at the store, some three-quarters of a mile down the gulch.

The "store" was only a big wall tent at the forks of the cañon, and the stock consisted only of rough wearing apparel for miners, coffee, sugar, flour, pilot bread, bacon, frijoles (beans), tobacco, and a few kegs of whiskey, all packed into the camp on burros. A group of miners, all armed and some mounted, were gathered about the front of the tent; while to one side lay the figure of a man, the upper part of his body covered with a blanket.

"What's the trouble, boys?" I asked, as I rode up.

Two or three jerked their thumbs in the direction of the blanketed figure.

"Who is it?"

"Albany."

Albany was a man from New York State and a native of its capital, upon whose beauties and wealth he was always descanting and planning what he would do on his return there after having "made his pile." This had earned for him the

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sobriquet of "Albany." No one knew his other name, or if they had it was forgotten, and "Albany" answered the purpose as well as Tom Jones or John Smith.

I dismounted, and, going to the prostrate figure, turned back the blanket. Yes, it was Albany. His skull was crushed in a fearful manner, and his hair and the lower part of his beard matted with congealed blood. The boys had washed the grime and blood from his face in order to recognise the features.

"Who did it?"

"Dunno, unless 'twas Injun Joe: he's the only man missin' from camp. Jimson an' Kaintuck foun' Albany a layin' in front ov his tent with his head busted open. His hoss was gone, an' the tent had been ransacked, an' his gun, best clo'es, an' a lot ov grub took. Jimson come back an' got a hoss an' they brought him down here; then they started out to give the word while some ov the boys went up to fin' the trail.

"They's a lot ov barefooted tracks aroun', an' some ov 'em's made in the blood wha' his head laid, but none lead away. That don't go fer nothin' though, 'cause Albany's shoes is gone. They foun' the trail ov the hoss, an' it led over the hog back, down Toughnut gulch, in Coyote Pass, an' out on the desert towards t'other mountains. It pinted towards Stinkin' Wells. He's got purty nigh twelve hours start, an'll prob'ly camp thar to-night, makin' Mule Spring to-morrer night."

During this brief statement others had come up, until all the miners in the camp, something less than one hundred, were present. According to the custom we divided into five groups, and a slip of paper for every man in each group was thrown into a hat. On one slip in each hat was written "Go"; the others were blank. The men drawing the "Go" slips formed the vigilance committee to accompany the captain on the pursuit. I drew a "Go."

The captain gave orders to have all of Albany's camp outfit brought down to the store, and after adding to our scant supplies we filled our canteens at the spring, and filed away down the gulch to take up the trail at the foot of Coyote Pass.

In the dim light we discerned the hoofprints of the horse, evidently riding at a gallop and headed directly for Stinking Wells, the next water-hole. Paying no more attention to the trail, we rode away into the desert night straight for the wells. Indian Joe was a half-breed, who never acknowledged his tribal origin, but drifted about from one mining camp to another, picking up a precarious livelihood.

He was not known as a bad Indian, could be safely trusted with any message or to do any errand, and no miner where he was known would object to giving a meal, or several of them, if necessary. In fact, he was good-natured and harmless as Indians go, and it seemed almost impossible that he could have committed so foul a crime, yet the circumstantial evidence was too strong to admit of doubt.

It was early dawn when we rode up to the few cotton woods that surrounded the wells, or more properly the "sink" of tepid water. There was evidence of a recent camp, and down under the ashes were two or three half-dead coals, showing that the camp had been abandoned several hours before. We had breakfasted in the saddle, and after a brief council we decided to camp there for the day.

The trail of our quarry led straight for Mule Spring, in the mountains, miles away across that level stretch of desert. He had the advantage in knowing that pursuit could come but from one direction. If he had reached the mountains he would have no difficulty in seeing us far out on that level, and by abandoning his horse he could safely laugh at his pursuers. We figured it out that he would reach Mule Spring possibly that night, and would camp there. By travelling at night we would not only avoid the heat and the chance of being seen, but make more rapid progress, and by hard riding hope to reach the spring before he broke camp in the morning.

The sun had been up an hour as we began the ascent of a "hog back," beyond which in the cañon below was Mule Spring. A noise in the bushes to the right attracted our attention; there browsing on the leaves was Albany's horse.

There was no mistaking the raw-boned pinto, with the peculiarly blazed face. The saddle had been removed, and a lariat around his neck picketed him to the bushes. Indian Joe was still in camp at the spring, but why picket his horse away off here? We would soon know.

As we spurred our jaded horses up the ridge, a scattering volley of rifle shots was fired from somewhere over the cañon, and little clouds of dust were knocked up near a heap of rocks on the summit of the ridge. A puff of bluish white smoke arose from among the boulders, and the report of a single shot came down to us on the morning air.

As we neared the top we dismounted and ran, in a stooping posture, up the rocks, our rifles ready. Indian Joe turned from watching the cañon below, between two boulders, a grim smile on his swarthy face, his white teeth showing like a wolf's through his scraggy black moustache.

"Buenos, dias, amigos. You have ridden hard and well."

"You air our prisoner, Joe," said the captain.

"Bueno. Take me away from here and I will thank you, señor."

"What's the trouble?"

"Apache Kid and a dozen of his cowardly coyotes are on the other side of the cañon; they were fifteen," and again that grim smile passed over his face.

"But you air a Injun; what are they after you for?"

"Yes, but, gracias a Dios, I am not an Apache. Besides, have I not a gun, cartridges, and a horse? I picketed my horse below there in the bushes last night and made my camp here among the rocks to watch for your approach, my amigos, and was awake long before the day. As the night went deeper into the cañon I saw about the spring Kid and his band. At the same time they found my trail and that of the horse, and followed it straight for the rocks, but not far. Two lie below us at the foot of the hill; on the rocks across yonder you may see another."

Hardly had he finished when another scattering volley came from the cliffs opposite; the bullets, glancing from the rocks, went singing away in other directions. With an oath, Jimson laid aside his rifle and clasped his left forearm with his right hand. Turning back the sleeve of his rough woollen shirt, we found a jagged hole in the flesh, torn by a glancing bullet. With part of the water left in Joe's canteen we moistened a spot in the dry earth, and, plastering the wound with mud, bandaged it with the bandana from around his neck.

Then we flattened ourselves behind the rocks and waited. We were in for a fight, that was evident. The murderous renegade, Kid, was not the sort to retreat before our small force, leaving his three dead unavenged. It was useless for us to try to escape; our horses were tired out, while his were fresh. He knew that his single enemy had been reinforced, but our thirsty horses having already crossed the divide to the spring told him how small the force was.

On the opposite side we occasionally caught sight of a red blanket inviting a shot, which was replied to from a dozen seemingly inaccessible places. "There's only one thing to do," said the captain. "We've got ter stay here an' try ter keep 'em off tel night, an' then make a sneak fer camp, pervidin' they don't git our hosses." However, the latter had already drunk their fill, and were coming back over the hog back to graze.

As the day wore on the sun's power increased, and beat down upon us with terrible force. The rocks were blistering hot, and the heat radiated from them with scorching effect. Our thirst grew intolerable.

Our canteens had been emptied during the night ride, and Joe's contained less than a half-pint, which we carefully treasured against an emergency. There was not a bush or weed for shade among the boulders, nothing but the blistering rocks and the hot, dry earth.

Somewhere about noon Kaintuck carelessly exposed his shoulder for a moment, and had it badly cut by a bullet. The mud poultice required for the wound took the last of the water in Joe's canteen. By three o'clock in the afternoon the wounded men were almost crazed for water, which we could see purling about the rocks in the bottom of the cañon less

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than one hundred yards below, and the sight only increased the thirst of all.

Joe was the only man who did not complain, but lay flat on his stomach motionless, save when he lowered his head to glance between the sights of his rifle, or to throw another cartridge into the barrel.

There was absolutely no shelter in the cañon by which the spring could be reached. Nothing but the bare, brown hillside, the sandy bed of the cañon strewn with small boulders, the spring, and one hundred yards beyond the cliffs with death lurking at every point of vantage. A horned toad could not have hopped unseen at any spot in the entire distance.

"I've got ter hev some water," muttered Jimson between his teeth.

Joe turned his head.

"There is a spring a mile or two up the cañon," he said to the captain. "I can take the canteens, and, by slipping back down the hill, can go and come with water in less than an hour."

The captain grinned sarcastically. "Putty good scheme, Joe, but 'twon't work. We've got you, an' we're all goin' ter see this thing through tergether." Joe silently turned his face back to the crevice between the boulders and resumed his watch.

An hour passed. Picking up a canteen, Kaintuck, crazed with thirst, half started to his feet, but was jerked down by the captain just in time to escape a volley.

"Whar you goin'!"

"I've got ter hav some water, an' I'm goin' ter the spring," replied Kaintuck, struggling to free his unwounded shoulder from the firm grip.

"No, señor, I will go."

Kaintuck stopped struggling, and we gazed at Joe in surprise. "It air almost sure death," at last said the captain.

Joe looked him square in the eyes for an instant, then shrugged his shoulders. "Yes, señor;" but we understood. Taking four canteens, he tied two cartridges about the neck of each. "I will throw the canteens in the spring, the cartridges will pull the mouths below the water; while they are filling I will try to keep them from being hit. You must keep up a constant firing and hope for my return."

As he arose to his knees he said, "I will tell you the truth. I killed Albany. I wanted tobacco; he refused me; we were both drunk. I went to take the tobacco, and he struck me; I knocked him down, and he drew his revolver; but I struck him with a club before he could shoot. The sight of his blood maddened me, and—you know the rest." He gathered up the straps of the canteens. "I am going. Will you say good-bye?" Silently each man extended his hand, but the copper-coloured one was the steadiest of the lot.

Crouching, he sprang over the barricade of boulders with an "*Adios, amigos,*" and went leaping like a mountain lion down the bare slope. He was at the spring before the Apaches had recovered from their suprise. Throwing the canteens in the water, he began a series of gyrations about the spring, his steps timed by some weird song which we did not understand, but which evidently maddened the Apaches, who at once began a rapid fire on the dancer. Some paid dearly for the reckless exposure of their persons.

In a few moments Joe made a sweep with his hands and came bounding back up the slope, two canteens in each hand. We were too much excited to continue our fusillade into the cliffs beyond. With every nerve strained and breath suspended we lay there and watched every step of that dark-skinned figure running through the hail of death for our lives and his. On he staggers; another crash from the rifles; down he goes, struggles to rise, but fails, and holding the canteens upright tries to drag himself towards us. There was a clatter among the rocks as rifles were cast aside, and, forgetting their thirst and wounds, six men leaped over the boulders and ran to the fallen Indian, who, gasping on the hillside, still held the canteens so that the water would not spill.

Four of us grabbed him in our arms, Jimson and Kaintuck took the canteens, and we ran to the rocks. As we did so there was a chorus of yells from the cliffs, and the number of shots seemed redoubled, but we gained the shelter of our barricade unhurt, and laid our burden down tenderly.

"——*El agua—did—you*——." We held a canteen to his lips, but he turned away his head. "No—*muy poco* (very little)—save it."

There was absolutely no hope for him. He had been literally shot to pieces. His right arm and shoulder were shattered; another bullet had struck him in the kidneys, and two more had gone straight through him, from back to front. He lay there gasping for a few moments, then suddenly raised himself on his left elbow, tried to speak, his limbs straightened convulsively, and—Albany was avenged.

We moved the body to one side, out of the way. The captain picked up a canteen and, removing his hat, bowed his bared head towards Joe in silent acknowledgment, and after drinking passed the canteen. Having satisfied our thirst we took up our rifles, and the monotonous firing continued.

"Tan-a-ra, tan-a-ra, tan-a-ra," came the clear notes of a bugle down the gulch, just after a volley, and a squad of troops galloped round a bend in the cañon on the trail of the renegade Kid. Then there was a scattering on the cliffs, and we had our innings at the scurrying Indians.

"The surgeon is with the ambulance two miles below if you need him!" yelled the lieutenant in command, as dismounting the squad he took to the mountains in pursuit. We went down to the spring and waited for the ambulance to come up. Our captain borrowed a pick and shovel, and while the surgeon dressed the wounds of Jimson and Kaintuck the rest of us dug a grave for Joe among the rocks were he died.

It was nearly finished when the surgeon and our two comrades came up. "That's right, dig it deep; I see he is an Indian," said the surgeon. The captain straightened up in the grave, a reproving look on the face. "Yes, sir, he air only a Injun, but he died like a man."

Wrapping Joe in his blankets, we lowered his stiffening body into the grave with our lariats. Then we stood silent and gazed at the captain. He thought for a moment, and, removing his old weather-beaten hat, said:

"I dunno what ter say, boys, but I've heerd ur read som'ers that greater love hath no man than this."

Then we filled the grave, heaped it round with boulders to protect it from the coyotes, and, picking up our rifles, turned to depart. But evidently a thought of other days came over our old captain, for he paused, his blue-shirted figure straightened to its full height, and the heels of his rough mining boots came together with a chug. "Halt!" One look at him, and at least four of the party knew what was coming. "'Tention, squad! Ready! Fire!" and a soldier's last salute rang out on the evening air. Then we started back for camp across that weary stretch of desert.

Now, whenever I receive a word from the "committee," I see a bare, brown hill-top, and on its summit a rounded heap of stones, from which little clouds of bluish-white smoke are slowly drifting.

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THE OUTLAWS OF THE AIR.

By GEORGE GRIFFITH,

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Syren of the Skies," &c.

THE allotted forty-eight hours passed and no answer came back. As the forty-eighth struck, the two fleets of twenty-four vessels each, headed as before by the *War-Hawk* and *Volante*, rose into the air from Hyde Park and winged their way at a hundred miles an hour, the former to St. Petersburg and the latter to Paris. Before the last extremities were resorted to a second message was delivered to each city, repeating the terms of the former with the additional intimation that the indemnity would be increased a hundred millions for every day of delay and that the bombardment would begin within an hour.

But before a quarter of the hour was up both cities were in a state of utter panic and disorder. The terrible experiences, still fresh in the popular mind, of what the Anarchists had done under similar circumstances, made the mere sight of the air-ships, circling slowly in small divisions over the cities, with their guns pointing downwards, ahead, and astern, and the muzzles of the Maxims peeping from the port-holes in their broadsides, sufficient to drive the inhabitants into a frenzy of fear which made it impossible for the authorities to control them.

Vast throngs half mad with fear filled the streets and squares, besieging the Government buildings and demanding surrender on any terms, since absolutely certain destruction was the only alternative to it. But the authorities in both St. Petersburg and Paris could do nothing without the consent of the Tsar and the President, and the Tsar was at Posen preparing for an advance on Berlin, while the President was at Strassburg inspecting the now triumphant army of the Rhine which had driven the Germans out of Alsace and Lorraine.

Telegrams had been despatched to both on the first appearance of the air-ships, and the reply to the one from Paris was received just as the hour was expiring. Then a war balloon with a white flag flying from the car rose from the Garden of the Tuilleries; the *Volante* sank down to meet it, also flying a white flag, and Adams had a brief interview with the General in command of the city, who had ascended to meet him. The General informed him that the President had communicated with the Tsar, and that both refused to comply with the demand of the Syndicate. It was, therefore, impossible for Paris to make terms for France.

"Very well," said Adams. "Then I will spare Paris for the present, as it is helpless; but the President shall learn the cost of his refusal in Strassburg, and if he then persists Paris must prepare for its fate, for we are determined to bring the war to an end at any price."

Three hours later the fleet ranged itself in five divisions over the ancient city of Strassburg, which was thronged with troops in the full flush of victory. No warning was given this time, for it had already been telegraphed from Paris. The moment the ships were in position the work of death began.

It was short, sharp, and terrible. The streets were swept with incessant storms of Maxim bullets, and shells began bursting in fifty parts of the city at once. The air-ships flew to and fro far beyond the range of terrestial weapons, and in an hour the city lay little better than one vast shambles under the hurricane of death and destruction that had swept over it. At the end of an hour a white flag was hauled up the spire of the Cathedral, and the firing instantly ceased.

The *Volante* descended, and when she rose again, half-an-hour after, Adams had in his pocket the written consent of the President to an armistice of ten days between France and Britain, during which terms of peace were to be arranged. He then took his fleet back to London, replenished his fuel and ammunition, and the next morning he was far on his way to Posen and St. Petersburg to form a junction with the other fleets in case the Tsar had not consented to the terms accepted by his ally.

At Posen he found the whole Russian force, amounting to more than a million and a half of men, beginning the advance on Berlin under cover of a fleet of a hundred aerostats similar to those which Renault had destroyed over the Baltic. He took in the situation at a glance, and at once flew the signal to engage.

It was in vain that the huge, slow-moving aerostats tried first to cope with, and then to escape from, the agile cruisers of the air. One after another they were blown up by the shells, or sent, riddled and crippled, to the earth. When half of them had been destroyed, the second division of the Syndicate's fleet appeared on the scene of action from St. Petersburg, which had been spared as Paris had been, and for the same reasons.

The combined squadrons made very short work of the remainder, and as the last one vanished in a mist of flame a message was dropped to the earth calling upon the Tsar, who had watched the destruction of his aerial fleet in impotent rage, to stop his advance and accept the same terms that France had accepted. If within half an hour a white flag in token of consent was not upon his head-quarters the forces of the Syndicate would co-operate with the British and German armies before Berlin, and a hundred millions a day would be added to the indemnity until he surrendered. If in despite of this the war was prolonged for more than a week his head-quarters would be destroyed and himself put to death.

The half-hour passed and no white flag appeared; so, without firing another shot, the two squadrons turned westward in the direction of Berlin and the same evening formed a junction with the allied British and German forces. Three days later the final battle of the war was fought. Although the Russians considerably out-numbered the Allies, the loss of the aerostats on the one side and the presence of the air-ships on the other, made the issue a foregone conclusion from the first.

The *Voyageur* and two other air-ships had been constantly employed bringing fresh fuel and ammunition from London, and so the fleet was able to go fully equipped into the fight. Before their first assault had lasted half an hour the Russian commanders found it utterly impossible to keep even their best troops steady under the rain of shells, bombs, and machine-gun bullets that was hurled upon them from the sky. Wherever a bomb or a shell burst they broke and ran like so many sheep.

The British and German commanders were kept constantly informed of the position of the Russian forces and the havoc that was being wrought upon them, and when the confusion in the Russian ranks was at its height, the allied armies advanced in perfect order upon their demoralised foes. To a battle fought under such conditions there could be only one end. Five hours' fighting saw the complete collapse of the Russian host. From an army it had become a rabble.

A retreat was attempted soon after nightfall, but the search-lights of the air-ships flashed down upon them from the clouds, making their every movement plain to their pursuers, and after a night of indescribable carnage and destruction the Tsar at last surrendered his sword to the German Emperor and accepted terms of peace.

By the expiration of the ten days' armistice these terms were finally settled. France gave up the whole of her African possessions and spheres of influence to Britain and Germany, evacuated Madagascar and Siam, and gave guarantees for the payment of three hundred millions of war indemnity. Russia withdrew all her pretensions in Central Asia south of the 40th parallel of north latitude, the crossing of which, on any pretence, by her troops or allies, was to be for ever considered as a declaration of war.

The Tsar's obstinacy, or his ignorance of the power at the disposal of the Aerial Navigation Syndicate, had increased the Russian indemnity to six hundred millions. Thus eight hundred and fifty millions were practically at the disposal of the Directors of the Syndicate, whose original capital had been a million sterling. Two hundred millions each were given to Britain and Germany to cover the expenses of the war, and the remainder was divided equally among the original subscribers to the Syndicate.

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EPILOGUE.

THE NEW UTOPIA.

A YEAR after the signature of the final terms of peace a new State came into existence and took its place among the Powers of the world. This was the State of Oceana, and its jurisdiction extended over all the islands included within the vast parallelogram inclosed by the 30th parallels of North and South latitude and the 120th and 160th meridians of East and West longitude. A glance at the map will show that this includes nearly all those myriads of lovely islands which gem the bosom of the Central and Southern Pacific, and that is equivalent to understanding that the State of Oceana was beyond all comparison the most beautiful realm on earth.

Although it was in every sense a Sovereign State, free and independent of all control or interference on the part of other empires of the world, it was yet entirely unique among them in consequence of the fact that it was without government, politics, or laws in the ordinary acceptation of the terms. It was managed simply as a huge business concern, and its managers were the Directors of what had lately been known as the Aerial Navigation Syndicate.

The various islands had been acquired either by treaty or cession under the terms of peace, or else by purchase. The rights of the native inhabitants, which had been sorely infringed both materially and morally under the alleged "protectorates" of the Powers, which had exploited them chiefly for their own benefit, were restored.

Absolute religious, social, and commercial freedom was proclaimed throughout the whole area of Oceana, subject solely to two restrictions. The natives were forbidden to make war on each other under any circumstances, and any trader or other white person, whether a citizen of Oceana or not, convicted of giving or selling alcohol in any shape to them was to be put to death, as experience had clearly proved that to the Kanaka alcohol is poison.

Subject to this prohibition the trading ships of all nations were admitted on equal terms to the islands, but no war-ship was to be allowed to cross the invisible lines that formed its frontiers on any pretence whatever. The penalty for an attempt would be destruction, and all the nations of the world were given to understand that the Directors of Oceana not only would but could enforce it, for they had at their disposal four aerial fleets numbering a hundred vessels each, and the Powers of the earth did not need telling after what had happened in the war that this was a force capable of dominating the whole world were the policy of the Directors to change from one of peace to one of aggression.

Such was the outcome attained, as we have seen, through many and strange adventures and vicissitudes of the little social colony which had first been conceived in the brain of Edward Adams, and discussed and matured by the modest and obscure society which had called itself the Brotherhood of the Better Life.

Although Oceana possessed neither capital nor seat of government, yet all those who had been chiefly instrumental in achieving its greatness naturally returned to their lovely home in Utopia, there to continue the tranquil and natural existence which had been so rudely interrupted by the involuntary visit of the *Calypso* three years before. Only one or two changes had been made manifest when the colony once more settled down in its old home, and the nature of two at least of them may be guessed from the few lines that now remain to be written.

It was New Year's day 1901, and the first day of the new century was being celebrated in Utopia as the second anniversary of the foundation of the State of Oceana. Almost exactly such another picnic as had taken place on the fatal first of January two years before was being held on the slopes of Mount Plato, and just before sunset Violet and Dora were standing almost exactly where Dora and the rest had stood at the terrible moment when they saw the air-ship rising above the crater of Mount Orient. They had both been gazing for a little space in silence at the dark oval of the crater when Dora said:

They turned their backs on the darkening crater.

"Whenever I think of all that has passed since then and now I always think also how little people know who say that the age of miracles is past. Who would have thought then that within two years you would be standing here well and strong and the wife of the Lord High Admiral of the Aerial Fleets of Oceana?"

"Or," said Violet, slipping her arm through Dora's, "that a certain fair Socialist would so soon have been transformed into a millionairess, the Lady Bountiful of broad lands in capitalist England, and the wife of a Baronet who might be a Duke if he liked. I think there is quite as much miracle in that, your ladyship."

"If you ever use that horrid term of address again," said Dora, disengaging her arm and stepping back a pace, "I'll never rest until I've worried Harry into going to England and using the whole weight and influence of the State of Oceana in persuading the Queen into making your Admiral a Duke at the very least—and then I'll call you 'Your Grace' every time I meet you. Now come away back to the others, for every moment it grows darker I seem to see the shape of that awful air-ship growing out of the darkness over yonder."

"Don't," said Violet with a shudder, putting her arm round Dora's waist and turning her away.

And with that they turned their backs on the darkening crater and went down to the mountain side with the full glow of the tropical sunset shining in their eyes and lighting up two faces as fair as any that that day's sun had shone upon.

THE END.

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MRS. CASALIS' LAST BALL

UT merciful goodness!" the man cried out, driven to half-crazed desperation. "Don't you understand? Can't you understand? It is ruin! It is complete ruin!"

She stood before him like one of the antique Greek statues, that looked calmly out from jewelled eyes. Her cold mouth curved a little.

"I suppose you mean that our expenditure has been too heavy; that we must retrench. You are dramatic about it—as you are about everything." She shrugged her shoulders. "And you know that I detest the dramatic."

As he saw that still she did not understand, the moisture came out on his forehead.

"No; I do not mean that we must retrench, as you conceive the word, Camilla. I mean that everything is gone."

"Everything?"

"You will not starve. You will have a house over your head. But——"

"Thank you," she smiled ironically. "That is much. Yes, I think I understand now." She turned to the door.

"Camilla!" He called her back. His eyes strained out of his ashen face. "If you knew—if you knew!—how I have struggled against it! For months it has been coming. But I always hoped that I would retrieve all. But one unfortunate investment followed another. Still I would not tell you; I could not—could not! But now I will explain everything to you."

"Oh, pray spare me." She drew aside the folds of her house-robe as if his outstretched hand might seize and detain her. "I wish for no explanation of disagreeable subjects. After the ball I will hear as much of what you may have to say as I care to know—though speech is useless enough now."

"After the ball?" he repeated. "You do not mean—it is not possible—that you think of still giving this ball?"

"Certainly." She gazed at him through her cold glance. "This ball shall be given. My invitations went out to-day."

"But I say that it is monstrous!" cried Egbert Casalis. "Do you realise what will be said of me? In a fortnight more the whole world will know that I am a bankrupt. My honour——"

"Your honour!" she interrupted, laughing a little. "A man who marries a girl, above him socially, but of impoverished family, under the claim of being a wealthy man, and who, five years later, announces to her that he is bankrupt, need talk little of his honour."

She turned away again and finally, as she uttered the words. They had been spoken in her even, clear, cruel voice. Surely in the five years of their marriage Egbert Casalis had learned to know those tones well. They had never warmed with love or melted with tenderness. They had remained what they had been when he, a self-made man, a man who had arrived at great riches, despite his youth, had paid his addresses to the daughter of the old Vivians, and had been willing that she should marry him without, as she confessed with explicit calmness, loving him in the least.

. . . . . .

Mrs. Egbert Casalis had given her ball.

The early morning hours wore on towards the dawn. The last carriage rolled away. Mrs. Casalis' great ball had marked the summit of the social year. She had achieved her desire. She would fall; but it would be a fall enwrapped and decked in splendour.

She dismissed her servants for such remnant as was left of the night. And then she saw that, at the door of the wide, empty ball-room, littered with its scattered débris of crushed rose leaves, her husband was standing.

She was about to move past him without a word. He checked her.

"I have been waiting to see you until the last guest had gone. There has happened one thing of which I wish to speak to you—very briefly. I shall not keep you. The day after to-morrow the fact of my insolvency will have been published to the world. I had a relative—an uncle of my mother. He was an unmarried man, and rich. For years we had held no communication with each other. It came to me that I would appeal to him—not for myself—for you."

He paused. She stood, her head half-averted, reluctantly waiting. He looked at her. She did not see the glance.

He resumed:

"I wrote three days ago. To-day I received this letter."

He took out a folded sheet. "It is from the old man's lawyer. My mother's uncle died a week ago, and I am heir-at-law of all his property. It is estimated at a quarter of a million."

The silence that fell upon the great room could almost be heard. Not a muscle of Camilla's body moved. Her head was averted.

"I tell you this, because it is you—not I—who hereafter will own this fortune. That is all," resumed Casalis.

When she turned sharply he was gone. The blood surged to her cheeks, and left them again. Was it true? Yes; she knew that it was. She might taunt him with having won her by "false claims," but she knew, in her soul, that falsity and he could not together be mentioned. His word was never doubted. What did he mean, then, by saying that this fortune, which had fallen to him in the hour of direst need, like rain from the clouds, was to be hers not his? Gathering up the long, rustling train of her ball-dress, she mounted the stairs, she pushed open the door of his dressing-room——

"Egbert—My God!"

The cry broke from the lips that had grown stiff and still. She swept forward. Her white arm and wrist struck against his uplifted hand. The pistol, whose muzzle had been raised to the temple, diverted from its direction, was discharged, and the ball struck the wall.

"Egbert! Why did you do this? You were about to take your life! Why? Why?" Her hands closed upon his wrists. The vice-like pressure recalled him from the trance in which he had stood till then.

"Why not?" He spoke hoarsely. "Can you love me? Can anything recall the words you uttered two weeks ago?"

"Egbert! Forget them! Forget!"

"I thought I knew you," he went on as before; "I thought I knew you as cold—but not—not as you revealed yourself that day. I always hoped, hoped for your heart some day. That afternoon I saw you and your heart as they were. You have what you wish—a fortune. Me you do not need."

"I do!" she cried. "You must listen to me. You must understand me, though I scarcely understand myself! My heart was cruel and cold because it had never been awakened. I never knew you as you are—as the man you are!"

. . . . . .

Egbert Casalis and his wife have been abroad two years. Theirs is the model of a harmonious household. Their fortune, generously expended, draws society about them. But Mrs. Casalis has ceased to be a society woman.

"Since when have you so changed, Camilla?" ask her friends.

She smiles and replies:

"Since my last ball."

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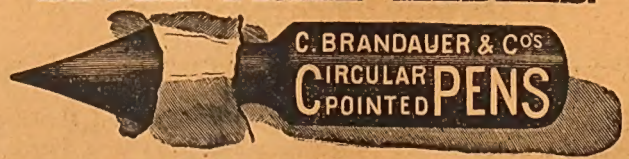

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